DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 936 RC 009 085

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TITLE Politics and Alaska Natives: One of a Series of Articles on the Native Land Claims.
INSTITUTION Alaska State Dept. of Education, Juneau.; Alaska Univ., Fairbanks. Center for Northern Educational Research.
PUB DATE Jun 75
NOTE 14p.; For related documents in this series, see RC 009 079-086; Occasional light print

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Alaska Natives; Curriculum Guides; Economic Development; *Federal Legislation; Land Acquisition; Leadership; Organizational Communication; *Political Power; *Politics; Post Secondary Education; *Rural Population; Secondary Education; Self Actualization
IDENTIFIERS *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act 1972

ABSTRACT

As one in a series of eight articles written by different professionals concerned with Alaska Native land claims, this article focuses on utilization of Alaska Native political resources as a means to achieve beneficial legislation beyond that of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1972. Designed to stimulate careful political and historical reading and discussion at an advanced secondary or adult level, this booklet identifies key terms and presents four class projects relative to the article. Major areas discussed in the text include: (1) Alaska's five political interest groups (State of Alaska; Federal government; urban population centers; industrial and profit oriented interests; and rural Alaska Natives); (2) the exploitation of rural Alaska by non-Native interests; (3) the inadequacies of the Settlement Act in terms of Alaska Native resource development; (4) the political resources of Alaska Natives (unity, 12 main organized groups, voting power, use of political education, land and money, and communication via the Alaska Federation of Natives); (5) the Alaska Natives' need to strengthen and utilize their political resources in order to achieve true self determination. (JC)

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rec 22-03-76

ED119936

politics and alaska natives

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One of a Series of Articles on

THE NATIVE LAND CLAIMS

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RC009085

POLITICS AND ALASKA NATIVES

By

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One of a Series of Articles on

THE NATIVE LAND CLAIMS

COMPILED & PRODUCED
JOINTLY BY

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AND

CENTER FOR NORTHERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA – FAIRBANKS

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JUNE 1975

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TO THE READER

This booklet is one of a collection of articles written by people who are interested in Native land claims. As you will see, all of the people do not agree. They present their ideas for you to read and discuss. You may be excited about some of their ideas because you think they are absolutely right, or very wrong. When you have finished reading the articles, you will probably have done a lot of thinking about Native land claims and Alaskan politics.

Politics is not an easy field to understand. And yet politics is what the Native land claims are all about. Most of the articles were written by people who have spent a lot of time working in the world of politics. These people have a whole vocabulary which most students have not yet learned. So, to help students understand the reading, there is at the beginning of each article a list of definitions of terms. Any words in *italics* are explained for you at the beginning of that article, or an earlier one.

At the end of some articles are questions which you can ask yourself. In the margin, next to the question are numbers. If you go back to paragraphs in the article with the same numbers, and reread, you can increase your understanding. We cannot say you will always have definite answers but you may form your point of view.

ARTICLES AND AUTHORS

Stock, Corporations, and the Native Land Claims Settlement	Stephen Conn Associate Professor of Law ISEGR, University of Alaska
Environmental Issues in the Land Claims	Guy Martin Alaska Legislative Aide to the Late Congressman, Nick Begich
New Tribes for New Times	Guy Martin Alaska Legislative Aide to the Late Congressman, Nick Begich
The Politics of Passage	Guy Martin Alaska Legislative Aide to the Late Congressman, Nick Begich
Politics and Alaska Natives	Harold Napoleon Director, Yupiktak Bista
Village Alaska	Harold Napoleon Director, Yupiktak Bista
Future Land Use Planning Alternatives for Alaska	Walter B. Parker Associate in Systems Planning Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center University of Alaska
Planning How to Use Land in Village Alaska	Bob Weeden Professor of Wildlife Management University of Alaska

POLITICS AND ALASKA NATIVES

As in any other state in the Union, Alaska has its own parties. These parties, or political interest groups, are not necessarily just Republican and Democrat. Within each party there are those who disagree with party leaders on certain issues. In Alaska one can generalize about what the political interest groups are. There are five main political interests, all existing in both parties.

The first "party," one can say, is the State of Alaska or those people looking out for the best interest, the development of the state over the development of the cities and the rural areas. For instance, the state selection of lands in the Prudhoe Bay oil fields ignored the interests of the North Slope Eskimos. Building the pipeline is another issue that the state pushes for, ignoring the disagreeing elements in city and village. The state would see the pipeline built and money coming in, rather than hold it up for years. The conservationists in Alaska do not want to risk danger to the Alaskan ecological system. Men whose goals are to make Alaska an economically developed state make up a strong interest group.

The second main interest in the State of Alaska, and one that has had great impact on all Alaskans, is the federal government. Alaska is a part of the United States; and as a part of the United States it has to follow and succumb to Washington, D.C. How, then, is the federal government a political interest?

The federal government for its own needs has withdrawn lands that both the state and the other parties in Alaskan politics have wanted. For instance, most of the oil rich North Slope was a naval reserve. The federal government more or less has control over the Tongas National Forest, and recently it has withdrawn millions of acres of land for wildlife refuges and national parks, over the protests of the state and other interests in Alaska, like the Alaska Natives. It has also been holding up the building of the pipeline, making it impossible for Alaska to start making money on it. It has also used Amchitka for atomic test purposes against the protests of the whole of Alaskan citizens. The federal government most certainly does play its part in Alaskan affairs and politics.

The third main interest group in Alaska are the more populated areas of Alaska, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, etc. These more populated areas, economically and politically more developed than the rural areas, have their own interests. Although they have more roads, they want to update them. Although they have more schools, they want and need more. In other words, their needs and their interests conflict with those of the

rural areas. Both urban and rural areas are vying for state money. Where that money goes, is decided by the legislature. Evidently, the urban areas have more representation, and will therefore have their needs more easily met than the rural areas of Alaska, who do not have such a large delegation in Juneau.

The fourth political group, one that is going to have more impact on affairs in Alaska, is made up of industrial interests like the oil companies and the fisheries. These groups want to make money from Alaska; they will do it as quickly and cheaply as is possible. Their priority is not education, health and welfare of Alaskans; it is profit. This has been illustrated again by the pipeline. The oil companies want the pipeline built as soon as possible. And they have their own way of getting what they want as far as government is concerned. They have money and they use it to buy votes in any legislature. They are a powerful group and in many instances they get what they want.

Another way of illustrating the political involvement of industrial interests in Alaska is the oil companies' suit against the creation of the North Slope Borough. These oil companies are not Alaskan, but they will meddle with Alaskan affairs if Alaskans do not meet their needs, or if Alaskans threaten them. The reasons why the oil companies are suing against the creation of the North Slope Borough are obvious. The Borough will only be another taxing agent, and the oil companies will not stand for it.

The fifth, and last main political interest group in Alaska are the Alaskan Natives living in the rural areas of Alaska. The Alaska Natives are a natural interest group for several reasons. The first is their economic plight. Of all sections in Alaska, the rural areas are the poorest. It has been said many times that there are hardly any economic resources to be found out there. Alaska Natives are poor as a group. This sectional and ethnic poverty creates other problems, which naturally ties them together.

Due to their poverty they live in poor housing conditions. Due to their sectional poverty they do not have schools, hospitals, roads, or airports. In short, they do not have what other citizens of Alaska have: not even bare necessities like good water. There are several reasons why this situation exists.

First, there are supposedly no economic resources that they can tap. This reasoning is false. There are economic resources that the rural areas can utilize and exploit in order to fulfill their needs. The only stumbling block is that all these resources belong to people other than the Native people. The North

Slope Eskimos could be a rich group. They could have the money to build their own schools, to build hospitals, etc. The only catch is, what should be theirs belongs to the State of Alaska, and the federal government owns the rich Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4. The only thing that the North Slope Eskimos have now is the blessings of the Alaska Native Settlement Act and their borough, if they can keep it.

The Alaska Natives as a group could have the economic resources that everyone believes they do not have; for instance, the tourist industry. Every year thousands of people from the lower forty-eight and other countries flock to Alaska to see the "smiling Eskimo." But to see the smiling Eskimo costs them money. Where does this money go? To the travel bureaus and the airlines who own almost all the motels and gift shops in the villages. The Natives of Kotzebue, for instance, get very little money out of the tourist industry. The airlines are the ones who make it. But the Natives of Kotzebue are the attraction.

The fur industry is another industry that the Native people could very well control and utilize, but it does not belong to them. The Native trapper gets the furs, then sells them cheaply to the fur buyer who then sells them to factories, who make parkas, dress coats, etc. The end product of the cheap fur is a very expensive item which very few people can afford. It is a profitable industry. Why could not the Native people build a tannery, and hire from their areas women who are experts in the art of skinsewing? And why could they not sell fur clothing themselves, through retailers? Mainly because this industry is based elsewhere.

What does this say about the lack of resources in rural Alaska? It merely proves that there are resources in the rural areas of Alaska, but that they are being exploited by people out of rural Alaska. If the people of rural Alaska, Native and non-Native, could tap these resources they would not be so poverty-stricken.

The second reason tying the Native people together is their lack of education. One might say they are all searching to become educated.

Another factor that ties the Natives is their ethnic and cultural ties. All Alaska Natives are not Indians or Eskimos, but they are the first inhabitants of Alaska, and they all find themselves in the same boat. They have to work together in the political system of Alaska to meet their needs.

All of these interests in Alaskan politics were seen in the settlement of the Alaska Native Land Claims. In fact, the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act was a compromise of all these interests.

The Alaska Natives wanted at least 60 million acres of land in fee. The State of Alaska, through Governor Miller, did not want to give the Natives more than 10 million acres. Some non-Natives of Alaska thought the Natives should not get handouts from the "taxpayer's" money. The United States Congress was willing to give the Natives a "just" settlement. The oil interests were not too verbal on the subject, although they felt there was a threat in the Natives' receiving lands which might conflict with areas they were interested in, namely Prudhoe Bay.

It is now well known that the Natives did not get their 60 million acres of land, but forty million, in areas that were not claimed by the state or withdrawn by the federal government. The state received rights to its oil rich selections and other lands in Native territories. The federal government reserved its right to withdraw lands valuable to its goals. The conservationists also gave their input. The industrial interests did not see their Prudhoe Bay tied up by an Arctic Slope Native Association suit. In short everyone got what they wanted except the Native people. To everyone else it might have been a compromise, but to the Native people it was a mere pittance of what they actually wanted, of land that was rightfully theirs. Congress did not pass a "just" settlement, it passed an Act where everyone did not lose everything, but did not gain everything either. The only interest which won through the settlement act was the federal government which, in one clause reserved the right for the Secretary of the Interior to make withdrawals valuable to the government and areas where the Native people can claim lands. The Alaska Native Settlement Act is a product of a country where interests conflict but are resolved through politics.

ALASKA NATIVES AS A POLITICAL INTEREST GROUP

The Alaska Natives, because of their common poverty and needs, are a political interest group. Whether they are in the Republican or Democratic Party does not divide them. Democratic and Republican Natives are both seeking answers to their problems.

The Alaska Native Settlement Act is not the answer to the problems faced by the Alaska Natives. It is but another political asset that they have in trying to solve their problems. It is evident that they cannot solve their problems whith 962.5 million dollars and 40 million acres of land. Legislation from both the federal government and the state government has to be added to the act. In short, the Alaska Natives have to become politically active to get what they need. It is evident that no one else is going to solve their problems. Everyone, except the Alaska Natives, to date has been trying to solve their problems for them. Researchers, governmental agencies, church groups, and charities from many sources have been trying to solve Native problems through religion, education, welfare, and new ideas. Self-determination for the Alaska Native has to be the answer, for all of the people in the United States, only the Alaska Native knows himself better than everyone else. Only he can do what everyone cannot do - help himself. And he can do this through politics.

POLITICAL RESOURCES OF THE ALASKA NATIVES

In order for any political party to have any powers at all it has to have resources, political resources. A political resource might be thought of as a tool a party can use in order to get what it needs.

In order for a political party to have any strength at all, it has to have unity. The members of a party have to be together in their demands. The party has to have unity in action. In other words, a party has to act together, and not be moving in many directions at the same time.

The Alaska Natives have unity. It is in the interests of all Alaska Natives to see the rural areas developed. All Alaska Natives want a better educational system. They all need schools. They all need a better system of transportation. Alaska Natives are together in their needs. But they must channel their activities in a single action and direction in order to be effective. This is where organization comes in.

Organized groups are the most effective groups. A group of ten people, united and organized, are more effective than 100 disorganized and arguing.

There are now 12 main Alaskan Native Organizations: Arctic Slope Native Organization; Bering Straits Association; Northwest Alaska Native Organization; Association of Village Council Presidents, Tanana Chiefs Conference; Tlingit Haida Central Council, Cook Inlet Native Association; Aleut League, Chugach Native Association; Bristol Bay Native Association; Copper River Native Association; and Kodiak Area Native Association. And these 12 organizations are together in their common needs and goals. They created in 1966, the Alaska Federation of Natives, composed of all twelve.

The Native people are then, one of the most organized people in the State of Alaska. They are more united in their actions than any other interests in Alaska. The Alaska Federation signifies unity in demands and action. Alaska Natives only need to channel their actions as one and they cannot be ignored.

They are indeed a statewide organization.

As another political resource, the Alaska Natives have the voting power. As a block, they are one of the most powerful voting groups in Alaska. They can decide who is to be governor, senator, and representative. Even more important, in largely Native legislative and senatorial districts in Alaska, they can elect their own leaders who would best serve their interests. (Illustration of predominantly Native districts)

Another political resource that the Alaskan Native people could utilize is education, not so much by learning the ABC's, but by educating their people to issues which they should know about. They have to educate them in their rights as citizens, and in the workings of government. And most importantly they have to realize that voting is their strongest weapon which they must use to their advantage.

Money is another political resource that the Alaska Natives now have. They need money to organize, to study. They need money to campaign. And money does have its own way of deciding issues. Land can be considered in this category as well. Without money, a political party is restricted in its activities. Now that the Natives do have money, they must use it to their advantage.

Communication is yet another resource that the Alaskan Native must use. In order to work together and know what the other organizations are doing, the Native people must communicate. It is impossible to work in a unified fashion if one organization does not know what all the others are doing. The Alaska Federation of Natives can serve this purpose, and it already has.

Leadership is another resource that the Alaskan Natives have lacked before, but have available today. In order for anyone to be in a position of leadership, a person must first of all understand the condition that his people are in. Secondly he must be able to understand the workings of government, and how he can best achieve the goals that his people have given him. Although there are many illiterate Native leaders, the time is coming and has arrived, when the younger, more literate, more learned leaders must take over. Especially now with the passage of the Alaska Native Settlement Act. In years before, the Alaska Natives have not always utilized their political resources, mainly because they did not know they had them. Now they need leaders who know what they can and cannot do.

How then can the Alaska Natives use these political resources? The answer is a logical and a rather simple one.

They must strengthen their organizations. They must set their goals. They must plan a course of action in order to get into a position where they affect legislation, and they must do so in a unified manner. Furthermore, they must exploit their voting power and elect their own leadership into legislative and other positions.

They must also educate their people on issues. They have to educate them in their rights, and they must, most importantly, show them what they can do if they will only act. Education must not stop in the villages; it should also hit the more populous areas of Alaska. The reason why many people in Anchorage and Fairbanks and other population centers are so unconcerned about village Alaska is because they do not know about it all. If the Native leadership would only inform them of conditions in village Alaska, it is not unlikely that many of them would push for betterment.

Communications must also be strengthened. All regions must be aware of the problems of the other regions. For in being informed of what the other regions are doing, they can supplement them in the same sort of action. Communication is one of the most important political resources, and it must be used to the fullest. Whether this means telephone communications or not is not the question, although it would help. It is important that the Native people communicate in order to act together for the desired ends.

If the Native people of Alaska would exploit their political resources they would no longer be the recipients of legislation passed by uninformed Congresses and legislatures. They would begin to pass legislation which would best fulfill their needs. In fact self-determination would become, not a dream, but a reality.

It is true that the rural areas of Alaska have a great many problems. But those problems, no matter how tremendous, can be solved. The Alaska Native people must search for solutions for those problems along with the whole state of Alaska. No matter how great the differences between the cities and village Alaska, with time those differences may be resolved.

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TERMS:

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM	an environment; all living and non-living things in an area
INPUT	information
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR	is the person appointed by the President to head the Department of the Interior, which runs the Bureau of Indian Affairs

CLASS PROJECTS:

The class should try to get a daily newspaper from one or more of the larger Alaskan cities. If you read several papers, you can see how the same story is reported in different ways.

In the article, Mr. Napoleon identifies five Alaskan interest groups – the State of Alaska, the federal government, populated areas (cities), industrial interests, and Alaskan Natives. As you read the papers, try to figure out which interest group is saying what. Take an issue like the pipeline, or land selection, and see what each interest group wants to happen.

Do all the federal government agencies agree on the issue? Do all the cities agree? Do all the Native leaders agree? You might ask these kinds of questions:

1. Who speaks for a particular interest group?
2. Who pays for that person to speak?
3. Which interest groups are cooperating against another group?
4. What does each group hope to gain by cooperating? What might be lost?
5. How does each interest group get people to agree with its position?

As you discuss the issues in class, some students may try to change the minds of other students. How do you change people's minds on issues? Which ways are fair, and which aren't?